

prove almost anything. Matthew Arnold, discussing in this way the Celtic and Teutonic elements in our literature, reached the most curious conclusions by contrasting, as racially characteristic, the worst doggerel he could find on an English tombstone with some elaborate triad from early Welsh poetry. Still, it is surely not too rash to say that 'John Bull'<sup>5</sup> has always been a far more prosaic, far less passionate and imaginative figure than la belle France'; and yet, for some reason, it is from north of the Channel that the richer poetry has come.

Or consider the effect of landscape. To generations the Alps have seemed the embodiment of the sublime and beautiful; few would claim that for London and the Midlands. And yet, name the six chief poets of Switzerland—there indeed would be a test of general knowledge. And how many poets have ever lived in the real Arcadia, heartrendingly beautiful as its mountains remain to this day? Whereas Cambridge, set in the grey sobriety of its fenlands, has, as we all know, been a nest of nightingales for centuries.

Is there some law of reaction to explain this paradox? Is it like the tendency of the dwellers in flat lands, from Babel to Venetia and Flanders, to pile up heaven-piercing towers? Shall we say that, as only the hardiest of plants can survive in a Sahara, so there are no poets so poetic as those born into some Philistia; and retire with a glowing

sense of having added to the great store  
of general  
truths?

Alas, they are half-truths at best. If the  
prosaic English  
have produced great poetry, the prosaic  
Swiss have not;  
and if the natural beauty of Switzerland has  
failed to  
produce it, what on the other hand of the  
natural beauty  
of Greece—which seems so naturally  
reflected in the  
beauty of Greek literature? Our  
generalisations collapse;